

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

**Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand
and an Exchange With Reporters**

May 31, 2022

President Biden. Well, good morning, everybody. And it's good to see a not-so-old, but a good friend here. And, Prime Minister, welcome to the White House. And we last saw each other at the launch of the Indo-Pacific Framework——

Prime Minister Ardern. Yes.

President Biden. ——which is, I think, a fairly big deal for all of us, and we need your guidance. And we're—and you know, it's a pleasure to see you in person.

You understand that your leadership has taken on a critical role in this global stage—and it really has—galvanizing action on climate change; the global effort to curb violence, extremism, and online, like happened in Christchurch, I recall. And you know, we want to be—I want to work with you on that effort. And I want to talk to you about what those conversations were like, if you're willing.

The United States is, you know—it's just been—there's a—there's an expression by an Irish poet that says, "Too long a suffering makes a stone of the heart." Well, there's an awful lot of suffering. We've been—I've been to more mass shooting aftermaths than, I think, any President in American history, unfortunately. And it's just—so much of it is—much of it is preventable, and the devastation is amazing.

Yesterday—or not—the day before, I was up—I was down in Texas. And people sat in a room—about 250 of them in a large room—with me for almost 4 hours. Not—nobody left. They wanted to—until after—until I spoke to every single person in that room. Every single person, they waited to the very end. And their—the pain is palpable.

And you've been one of our closest partners with a long history and friendship. Eighty years ago, marines landed in New Zealand before embarking on—into the Pacific theater in World War II. And I think I told you, when I met my—two of my mother's brothers who were in the Pacific—they used to be able to deploy at the same time in those days, in World War II. And one was shot down in New Guinea. And they never found the body. But it's—you know, it's—the history goes back a long way—a long way.

And I want to, by the way, recognize New Zealand's significant support for Ukraine, as a lot of Indo-Pacific countries are doing now. And—because this is more than just a regional war going on.

So I look forward to our conversations today. We have a lot to talk about. And I'm really, really delighted to have you here—really.

Prime Minister Ardern. Thank you. And can I say, Mr. President, thank you, so much—so much——

President Biden. You—you can do anything you want.

Prime Minister Ardern. Great. *[Laughter]* Thank you. And we really welcome this opportunity.

As you've said, we've spoken on several occasions. And what stood out to me on both those occasions were, we traversed such similar issues, and not least, of course, our shared history. You

speak of your uncle's service in the Pacific; my grandfather served in the Pacific. And I think that speaks to the personal connection but also the depth of our friendship and relationship as two countries.

We are in an incredibly difficult international environment. But also, domestically, it is extraordinarily challenging as well. And can I bring the sincere condolences of the people of Aotearoa New Zealand for what you have experienced in Texas and in New York? And it's been devastating to see the impact on those communities.

Our experience, of course, in this regard, is our own. But if there's anything that we can share that would be of any value, we are here to share it.

President Biden. Well, the work you're doing with tech companies is really important, and I want——

Prime Minister Ardern. Absolutely.

President Biden. ——to work with you there as well.

Prime Minister Ardern. And I absolutely look forward to updating you on some of the conversations we've had this week, because I hold hope that we can make progress.

I also wanted just to acknowledge your leadership in bringing to the table the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. And whilst, of course, we are significant advocates for the CPTPP, the IPEF presents a significant opportunity to build the economic resilience of our region. So I look forward to having a bit of a discussion about that opportunity as well.

I also want to acknowledge your significant leadership on Ukraine and how important that has been not only to us as we've looked to play a role as well, but globally, as we look to make sure that we strengthen the international response to what is a threat to our values and, of course, the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine.

I do want to finish on a note of optimism. Climate change also is one of the greatest threats that we face. And I believe that, in you, not only have we seen the leadership, but the opportunity that exists between our nations to work together on this incredibly difficult issue that will only be resolved if we work together.

So thank you. With—as you've seen, we've got a lot to discuss, so——

President Biden. We've got a lot to do. And I want to emphasize the last point you made: "working together."

Prime Minister Ardern. Absolutely.

President Biden. We are not coming to dictate or lay down the law. We——

Prime Minister Ardern. Yes.

President Biden. ——we have more work to do in those Pacific Islands as well. I mean, we've—and so we talked at length about—in the past about my trip to Japan——

Prime Minister Ardern. Yes.

President Biden. ——and Korea and then dealing with the Quad. And so—but I think there's a lot of opportunity——

Prime Minister Ardern. Yes, I agree.

President Biden. ——to make the world safer and deal with the environment.

Prime Minister Ardern. I agree. I agree. So thank you.

President Biden. Thank you.

Thank you all very much.

Gun Control Legislation

Q. Mr. President, will you meet with Senator McConnell on guns?

President Biden. I will meet with the Congress on guns, I promise you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : New Zealand, Prime Minister Ardern.

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